

1 - Overview and Program Directives



Introduction

Scope

These standards apply to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They are designed to ensure safe, effective, and efficient wildland fire operations. This document is reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide current operational policies, procedures, and guidelines for managing wildland fire.

Overview

Safe, effective, and efficient wildland fire operations require a thorough understanding of many policies, principles, and procedures. Wildland fire operations also require a personal commitment to safety and excellence. This document provides a ready reference of policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure safe and effective wildland fire operations.

Policy

The following policies are accepted and endorsed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior. They provide consistent and compatible fire management practices among federal wildland fire management agencies, and guide BLM wildland fire operations.

Safety

Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All fire management plans and activities must reflect this commitment:

- All fire personnel will meet appropriate training, experience, and qualification requirements for incident assignments. (See NWCG 310-1 and DOI Incident Qualification and Certification System).

- All fire personnel will be equipped with approved personal protective equipment.
- All BLM personnel assigned to fireline duties will complete annual refresher training.
- All wildland fire entrapments and fatalities will be reported using current National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) initial entrapment/fatality report form.
- All wildland fire serious accidents will be investigated using the interagency wildland fire serious accident investigation procedures.
- Follow all safety standards and guidelines identified within the *Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook*, *Fireline Handbook*, and those outlined in *BLM Standards for Fire Operations*.

Planning Policy

Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved fire management plan. Plans must address firefighter and public safety, values to be protected, and public health issues; and be consistent with land and resource management plans. Fire management plans must also address potential wildland fire occurrences and include the full range of fire management actions. Plans must also promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis across agency boundaries.

- Until a fire management plan is approved, BLM units must take an aggressive suppression action on all wildland fires consistent with firefighter and public safety and resources to be protected.
- Without an approved fire management plan, resource benefits cannot be a primary consideration influencing selection of a management strategy although resource impacts of suppression alternatives can be considered in the decision.

Wildland Fire

Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, across agency boundaries, and will be based upon best available science. All use of fire for resource management requires a formal prescription. Management actions taken on wildland fires will be consistent with approved fire management plans.

Prevention

BLM will work with other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

Fire Use

Prescribed fire is used to alter, maintain, or restore vegetative communities, achieve potential future condition, and to protect life, property, and values that would be degraded by wildland fire.

- All prescribed fire projects will have a written and approved burn plan prior to ignition.
- All burn plans will contain measurable objectives, predetermined prescription, and a contingency plan if the fire escapes.
- All prescribed fire projects will be in compliance with NEPA requirements.

Preparedness

BLM managers will provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, and equipment.

- Preparedness planning must be accomplished annually at all organizational levels.
- When conditions exceed those of the normal fire year, severity planning must be developed considering agency and interagency needs on local, geographic, and national bases.
- Annual operating plans and unit operating procedures will be updated annually.
- Preparedness reviews will be conducted annually to determine the level of preparedness.

Suppression

Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, consistent with resource objectives.

- Fire management will be based on firefighter and public safety, cost-effectiveness, benefits, and values to be protected consistent with resource objectives by using the full range of strategic and tactical options as described in an approved fire management plan. Without an approved plan suppression action must be taken.
- All BLM units will utilize a decision making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against selected environmental, social, political, and economic criteria.

Protection Priorities

Protection priorities are: 1) human life, and 2) property and natural/cultural resources. If it becomes necessary to set priorities between property and natural/cultural resources, consider values to be protected and fire management costs. Once people have been committed to an incident, these resources become the highest value to be protected.

Interagency Cooperation

Fire management planning, preparedness, suppression, fire use, monitoring, and research will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of all partners.

Economic Efficiency

Fire management programs and activities will be based on economic analyses that incorporate commodity, non-commodity, and social values.

Wildland/Urban Interface

The operational role of federal agencies as a partner in the wildland/urban interface is wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire protection is the responsibility of tribal, state, and local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural suppression activities under formal fire protection agreements that specify the responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for facilities on lands they administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with structural protection.)

Administrator and Employee Roles

Employees who are trained and certified participate in the wildland fire program as the situation demands; employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as needed. Administrators are responsible and accountable for making employees available.

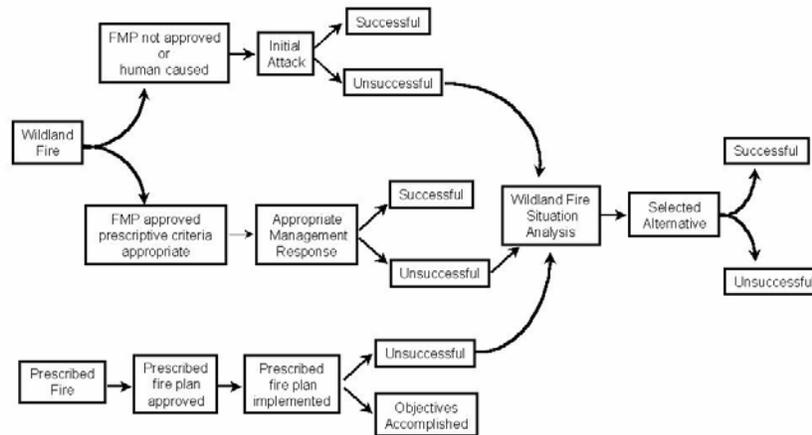
Fire Investigation and Cost Recovery

BLM policy requires all wildland fires to be investigated to determine cause, origin, and responsibility. The BLM must pursue cost recovery, or document why cost recovery is not initiated, for all human-caused fires on public and/or other lands under protection agreement.

Wildland Fire Policy Requirements and Implementation Procedures

The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (December 1995) directs federal agencies to achieve a balance between suppression to protect life, property, and resources, and fire use to regulate fuels and maintain healthy ecosystems. Most of the previous barriers and constraints to considering the benefits of fire and expanded fire use are removed through the policy.

The following NWCG flowchart represents the broad framework in which the new interagency policy will be implemented.



This flowchart defines all fires as either wildland or prescribed fires. Wildland fire management can follow one of two tracks, depending on the level of land management planning completed or the cause of the fire. Field offices without an approved fire management plan or with a human-caused wildland fire, have limited management options. In these situations, units may only implement initial attack strategies. When the fire management plan has been completed and approved, and wildland fires are from natural ignition sources, the full extent of management options is available. These options range from monitoring with minimal on-the-ground actions to intense suppression actions on all or portions of the fire perimeter. The appropriate management response is developed from analysis of the local situation, values to be protected, management objectives, external concerns, and land use.

Fire Policy Terminology

Definitions:

Wildland Fire – Any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland.

Fire Management Plan – A strategic plan that defines a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires. The fire management program objectives come from an approved land use plan, e.g., Resource Management Plan. The fire management plan is supplemented by operational plans such as preparedness, preplanned dispatch, prescribed fire, and prevention.

Appropriate Management Response – Specific actions taken in response to a wildland fire to implement protection and fire use objectives.

Preparedness – Activities that lead to safe, efficient, and cost effective fire management program in support of land and resource management objectives through appropriate planning and coordination.

Prescribed Fire – Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements must be met, prior to ignition.

Initial Attack – An aggressive suppression action consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.

Prescription – Measurable criteria which guide selection of appropriate management response and actions. Prescription criteria may include safety, economic, public health, environmental, geographic, administrative, social, or legal considerations.

Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) – A decision-making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against safety, environmental, social, economical, political, and resource management objectives as selected criteria.

Fire Management Objectives

The objectives of the wildland fire management program are to:

- 1) Protect human life and property and natural/cultural resources both within and adjacent to BLM-administered lands.
- 2) Minimize damages and maximize overall benefits of wildland fire within the framework of land use objectives and resource management plans.
- 3) Manage the wildland fire program in accordance with congressional intent as expressed in the annual appropriations acts, and comply with applicable departmental manual and BLM policies and procedures.
- 4) Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis.
- 5) Employ strategies to manage wildland fires that provide for firefighter and public safety, minimize cost and resource damage, consistent with values to be protected and management objectives.
- 6) Prevent unplanned human-caused ignitions.
- 7) Restore and rehabilitate resources and improvements lost in or damaged by fire or suppression activities.
- 8) Minimize and, where necessary, mitigate human-induced impacts to resources, natural processes, or improvements attributable to wildland fire activities.
- 9) Promote public understanding of fire management programs and objectives.
- 10) Organize and maintain a fire management capability which consistently applies the highest standards of professional and technical expertise.
- 11) Encourage research to advance understanding of fire behavior, effects, ecology, and management.
- 12) Integrate fire and management.
- 13) Investigate all human-caused fires.

